

Message Text

SECRET

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION USUN
WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 8082

EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y FOR PARA TWO
KKO. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PBOR, IS, EG, XF, US
SUBJECT: WEIZMAN AND PERES ON THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT AND THE FUTURE
OF THE PEACE PROCESS

1. DURING RECENT DAYS I HAVE HAD OPPORTUNITY AT VARIOUS
SOCIAL EVENTS TO HAVE LENGTHY, PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH
BOTH WEIZMAN AND PERES. THERE WERE SOME STRIKING PARALLELS
IN THEIR MOODS AND IN THEIR ASSESSMENTS OF THE BEGIN
GOVERNMENT'S POSITION. BOTH MEN WERE DISGUSTED WITH THE
CABINET'S STATEMENT; PROFESSED TO BE BAFFLED BY DAYAN'S
ROLE AND PRESENT POSITION; WERE HIGHLY CRITICAL OF BEGIN
PERSONALLY FOR HIS INABILITY TO RISE ABOVE HIS IDEOLOGY,
YET SYMPATHETIC TO THE PERSONAL DILEMMAS HE FACES AND
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SOLICITOUS OF HIS HEALTH; AND WERE DETERMINED TO PRESS
AHEAD ON THEIR RESPECTIVE COURSES. BOTH LEADERS SEEM TO
ME TO HAVE REACHED SEPARATELY THE CONCLUSION THAT THE
PRESENT BEGIN CABINET NOW FACES A LIMITED LIFESPAN.

2. WEIZMAN WAS OF COURSE PREOCCUPIED WITH THE FALL-OUT
FROM HIS INTEMPERATE REMARKS ABOUT BEGIN AND DAYAN AFTER

THE CABINET MEETING JUNE 18, ECHOES OF WHICH ARE STILL REVERBERATING ACROSS THE ISRAELI POLITICAL LANDSCAPE. HE WAS TOTALLY UNREPENTANT, PARTICULARLY ABOUT HIS VERY CRITICAL COMMENTS ABOUT DAYAN, AND CONTINUES TO BE OUT-SPOKEN IN PRIVATE GROUPS, IF WHILE SOMEWHAT MORE CAUTIOUS IN PUBLIC. (EVIDENCE OF FALL-OUT FROM THE WEIZMAN OUT-BURST WAS THE FACT THAT MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY YIGAL HURWITZ HAS BEEN CALLING PUBLICLY FOR WEIZMAN'S RESIGNATION--UNDOUBTEDLY REFLECTING HIS CLOSE TIES TO DAYAN.) WEIZMAN IS DETERMINED NOT TO RESIGN FROM THE CABINET BUT RATHER TO KEEP FIGHTING FOR HIS THESIS THAT SADAT IS INDEED SINCERE IN WANTING TO MAKE PEACE WITH ISRAEL AND THAT THIS MOMENT MUST NOT BE LOST BY ISRAELI DIPLOMATIC FUMBLING. HE INSISTS THAT HIS FELLOW HERUT PARTY MEMBERS ARE BY NO MEANS AS CRITICAL OF HIM AS THE PRESS WOULD LEAD PEOPLE TO BELIEVE, THOUGH HIS COMMENTS ABOUT HERUT HAD SOMETHING OF THE QUALITY OF WHISTLING IN THE DARK. (PRESS ACCOUNTS TODAY OF THE FAVORABLE IMPACT HE MADE LAST NIGHT ON HERUT AND OTHER LIKUD KNESSET MEMBERS IN PRESENTING AN AGGRESSIVE DEFENSE OF HIS VIEWS SEEMS TO BEAR OUT HIS OPTIMISM.) WEIZMAN CONTINUES TO BERATE HIS FELLOW CABINET MEMBERS AS TOTALLY LACKING IN EITHER COMPREHENSION OF THE OPPORTUNITY WHICH IS SLIPPING AWAY, OR THE BACKBONE TO STAND UP FOR THEIR CONVICTIONS. HE SAID THAT A CLEAR MAJORITY OF THE CABINET HAD ORIGINALLY SUPPORTED HIS PROPOSED FORMULATION OF THE
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ISRAELI ANSWERS, ONLY TO BACK DOWN TO AVOID A CABINET CRISIS WITH BEGIN.

3. WEIZMAN WAS OBVIOUSLY THE SOURCE FOR A STORY IN HAARETZ BY ZEV SCHIFF WHICH SAID THAT BEGIN HAD CHANGED HIS FORMULATION ONLY A FEW MINUTES BEFORE THE CABINET SESSION BEGIN AND DELETED A KEY SENTENCE WHICH REFERRED TO THE "STATUS OF THE TERRITORIES." WEIZMAN HAD RECOUNTED THIS SAME STORY TO ME. HE SAW THE PRIME MINISTER FIFTEEN MINUTES BEFORE THE CABINET SESSION BEGIN, WAS SHOWN A TEXT OF BEGIN'S PROPOSAL WHICH INCORPORATED A KEY PHRASE CONCERNING ULTIMATE STATUS OF THE TERRITORIES WHICH HE COULD HAVE SUPPORTED. WEIZMAN WAS DUMBFOUNDED WHEN THE CABINET MEETING OPENED TO BE PRESENTED WITH BEGIN'S PROPOSAL WITHOUT THIS PHRASE. HE ASSUMES OF COURSE THAT DAYAN OR SOMEONE COLLUDED WITH BEGIN IN THE INTERVENING TEN MINUTES TO DOUBLECROSS HIM. WEIZMAN REMAINS EAGER TO GET BACK INTO HIS DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH GAMASY, BUT NOW SADLY ADMITS THAT NEITHER HIS OWN CABINET NOR SADAT WILL PERMIT HIM TO RETURN TO EGYPT. HIS OVERALL MOOD IS ONE OF DETERMINATION TO KEEP UP HIS FIGHT, MIXED WITH PERIODIC REFERENCES TO FACT THAT HE

MAY HAVE TO SOON RETURN TO HIS PRIVATE BUSINESS--BUT
THAT ANY SUCH RETURN WOULD NOT BE VOLUNTARY ON HIS PART.

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4. PERES WAS SCORNFUL OF THE CABINET DECISION, CONVINCED
ON THE BASIS OF HIS OWN MEETING WITH SADAT IN VIENNA THAT
THE LABOR PARTY POSITION WOULD BE ADEQUATE TO GET THE
NEGOTIATIONS BACK ON TRACK, AND MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT
HIS PARTY'S CHANCES OF RETURNING TO POWER IN THE NEAR
FUTURE THAN I HAD EVER SEEN HIM. WITH THE HELP OF A
COUPLE OF SCOTCHES, PERES WAS VERY FORTHCOMING ABOUT
SOME OF THE BACKSTAGE POLITICAL MANEUVERING IN WHICH HE
HAS BEEN ENGAGED IN RECENT DAYS. HE HAS HELD SOME
FRUITFUL MEETINGS WITH NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY LEADERS,
LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR EVENTUAL RECONSTITUTION OF
THEIR FORMER ALLIANCE WITH THE LABOR PARTY WHICH HAD
ENDURED FOR MANY YEARS UNTIL THE NRP JOINED WITH THE
LIKUD TO FORM THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. PERES IS CONVINCED
THAT SO LONG AS BEGIN IS PRIME MINISTER THE NRP WILL
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STAY WITH BEGIN, BUT THAT RATHER THAN ALLY WITH ANY OTHER LIKUD LEADER THEY WILL RETURN TO LABOR'S SIDE. HE WAS SURPRISINGLY COMPLIMENTARY ABOUT MINISTER OF EDUCATION HAMMER, WHOM HE CHARACTERIZED AS "THE BEST BALANCED MAN IN THE CABINET."

5. PERES HAS NOW GIVEN UP ON YADIN'S DMC AS THEY KEY FACTOR IN THE EQUATION, AFTER HAVING TRIED FOR MANY MONTHS TO PERSUADE THE DMC TO STAY IN OPPOSITION AND PREPARE FOR A COALITION WITH LABOR. HE SAYS THAT THE DMC IS "NOW IN RUINS." HE DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT A DECISION BY THE DMC TO LEAVE THE GOVERNMENT WOULD PRODUCE ANYTHING OTHER THAN A SHARP SPLIT IN THE PARTY, WITH ENOUGH MEMBERS REMAINING WITH THE LIKUD TO PRESERVE BEGIN'S MAJORITY. HIS SIGHTS ARE ALL ON THE NRP, POST-BEGIN. HE ASSUMES THE DMC OR WHATEVER WAS LEFT OF IT WOULD FOLLOW THE NRP LEAD. AS FOR WEIZMAN'S ROLE, PERES WOULD BE HAPPY TO HAVE WEIZMAN IN A COALITION, BUT ASSUMES THAT HE WOULD NOT HAVE VERY MANY HERUT MEMBERS WITH HIM AND THAT THEREFORE HE WOULD OF COURSE NOT BE THE "SENIOR PARTNER."

6. MUCH OF PERES' OPTIMISM SEEMED TO STEM FROM A FEELING OF CONSIDERABLE RELIEF AT THE IMPROVED FINANCIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL FORTUNES OF THE LABOR PARTY. HE CANDIDLY ADMITTED THAT THE PARTY HAD BEEN IN DREADFUL SHAPE FOR MANY MONTHS, BUT NOW SEEMED CONFIDENT IT HAD TURNED A CORNER.

7. THE OTHER PART OF HIS OPTIMISM CLEARLY CAME FROM HIS JUDGMENT THAT BEGIN WAS INCREASINGLY INEFFECTIVE IN RUNNING HIS GOVERNMENT AND THAT HIS HEALTH WAS A MAJOR FACTOR IN THAT SLIPPAGE. HE CLAIMS TO HOPE THAT THE
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BEGIN COALITION HOLDS TOGETHER FOR A WHILE LONGER TO PERMIT LABOR TO GET MORE IN A POSITION TO PROFIT FROM ITS TROUBLES. BUT AT LEAST ON THIS OCCASION, PERES SEEMED GENUINELY CONVINCED THAT BEGIN'S GOVERNMENT COULD COLLAPSE MUCH SOONER THAN HE HAD PREVIOUSLY BELIEVED. EXACTLY HOW THAT COLLAPSE WOULD TAKE PLACE WAS NOT CLEAR. BUT IT SEEMED TO BE PERES' VIEW THAT IT WOULD OCCUR AS A RESULT OF ITS OWN DEMONSTRATED INCAPACITIES TO DEAL WITH EITHER THE DIPLOMATIC CHALLENGES FACING THE GOVERNMENT OR A NUMBER OF TROUBLING DOMESTIC ISSUES.

8. COMMENT: BOTH WEIZMAN AND PERES FOR DIFFERENT

REASONS ARE PROBABLY INCLINED AT THIS POINT TO BE LOOKING
AT THE POLITICAL SCENE THROUGH ROSE-COLORED GLASSES.
YET THERE IS NO DENYING THE FACT THAT WEIZMAN'S OUT-
SPOKEN OPPOSITION TO THE CABINET POSITION, COMBINED WITH
PERES' NEW CONFIDENCE IN HIS PARTY'S POTENTIAL FOR
REJUVENATION, ARE NEW AND SIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS IN THE
POLITICAL PANORAMA.
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